

Sustainable Leadership Project Progress Report



November 2023

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Section 1 Project Overview



Project Rationale

The importance of school leadership as an influence on, and key determinant of, pupil learning has been clearly established. The equation is simple - effective school leadership leads to school effectiveness, which in turn leads to better outcomes for children. It is, therefore, a priority that school leaders should be empowered and supported to deliver that effective leadership in our schools, thereby maintaining their focus on what is most closely aligned with their core purpose - leading teaching and learning.

IPPN's mission is essentially to enhance leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability in order to better ensure effective schools that deliver

those better outcomes for children. Ensuring the existence of that leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability will empower existing school leaders to thrive in their roles, and will also encourage greater numbers of aspiring leaders.

IPPN's direct engagement with school leaders has highlighted the increasing levels of challenge, frustration and disillusionment experienced and articulated by school leaders in response to their experience of the practice of leadership. The intensity of that sense of frustration and disillusionment has noticeably increased in recent years and has prompted IPPN to undertake this Sustainable Leadership project.

Evidence Gathering and Analysis

As part of phase 1 of the project, we endeavoured to do two things:

- to provide a research-informed analysis of the current reality of primary school leadership and
- to explore the key issues and identify solutions that will have a positive impact on leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability, with a consequential positive impact on school effectiveness and outcomes for children.

This culminated in the publication of a report last November – ***Primary School Leadership: The Case for Urgent Action – A Roadmap to Sustainability.***

The focus of the report is to understand:

- why so many of those who are tasked with one of the most strategically important roles in education, and a key determinant of a school's effectiveness, are struggling to sustain themselves in those roles
- what are the factors that are undermining that sustainability
- what is the impact on their leadership practice
- what are the implications for their health and well-being, and
- what can be done to render school leadership roles more sustainable.

Key findings from the report

Expansion of role

Since the role of the principal was last defined - by circular in 1973 - successive pieces of legislation, circulars, policies, guidelines and new initiatives have identified and leveraged the strategic importance of the role in terms of effecting reform and improvement, both at a school level and within the system. Each identifies the particular responsibilities that fall to school leadership.

In order to ascertain the exact breadth of these responsibilities, we analysed all active circulars for the period 2016 to 2022, as well as all of the key policy initiatives and guidance documents arising from education legislation, and logged the duties and responsibilities that are ascribed to school leadership. The period from 2016 was chosen for the analysis of circulars as the *Looking at our Schools* policy document, with its Quality Framework for Leadership and Management, was published in 2016. If that quality framework forms the basis of how leadership should be practised, it is reasonable to analyse duties and responsibilities in that context. In total, 162 documents were reviewed. Our analysis detailed the year-on-year expansion of the role that has arisen for school leaders because of this approach, which was included as Appendix 1 in the report.

In addition to an analysis of the role and responsibilities, we also reviewed the documents to identify into which of the domains from the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management the responsibilities fell. The results of that review are detailed in Table 1 below.

Leadership and Management Domain	Number of the 162 documents/ circulars analysed that have duties that fall into each domain	% of the 162 documents/ circulars analysed that have duties that fall into each domain
Leading Teaching and Learning	40	25%
Managing the Organisation	162	100%
Leading School Development	29	18%
Developing Leadership Capacity	22	14%

Table 1

Impact on sustainability

In order to ascertain the extent to which the sustainability of school leadership roles is compromised by this expanded workload and the disproportionate focus on management tasks, we issued a survey to our members, to which over 1,000 school leaders responded.

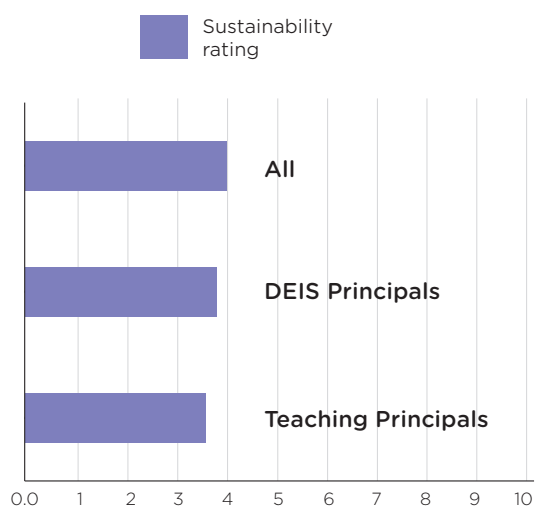


Figure 1 - Sustainability ratings of Principals 2022

We asked those school leaders to rate the current sustainability of their leadership role (0 being completely unsustainable and 10 being fully sustainable). Their responses (see Figure 1) told us that:

- principals rated the level of sustainability of their leadership roles at just **3.96**
- principals of DEIS schools rated the level of sustainability of their leadership roles at just **3.76**
- teaching principals rated the level of sustainability of their leadership roles at just **3.53**.

It was also noteworthy that 97% of respondents either strongly agreed (78%) or agreed (19%) that the key issue that undermines the sustainability of their leadership role is the number of tasks and responsibilities that divert their attention away from their core purpose as a school leader. In short, they are not being given the opportunity to do the job they signed up to do. See Figure 2 below.

The key issue that undermines the sustainability of my leadership role is the number of tasks and responsibilities that divert my attention away from my core purpose as a school leader

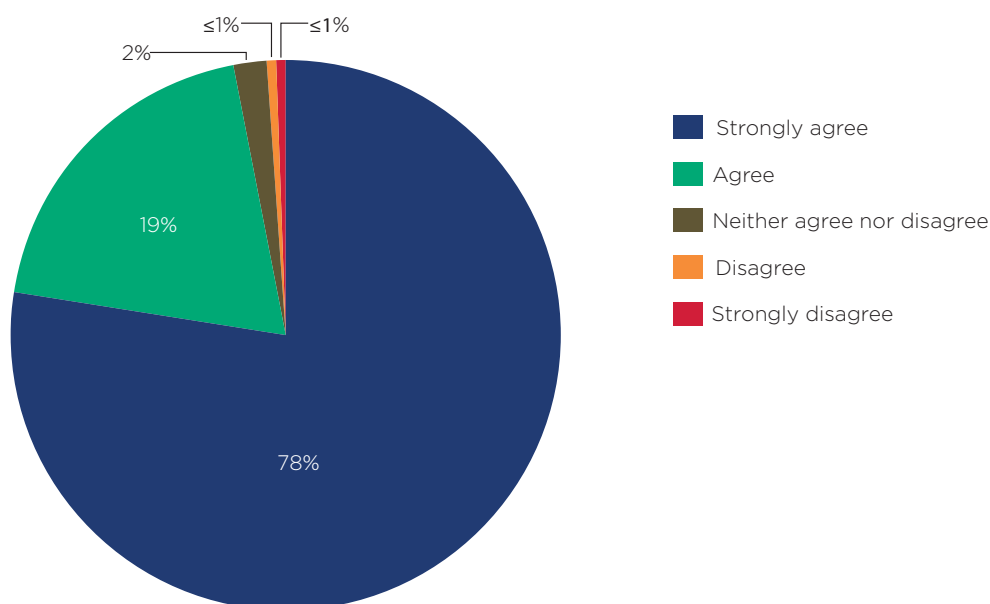


Figure 2 - Most significant factor that undermines leadership sustainability

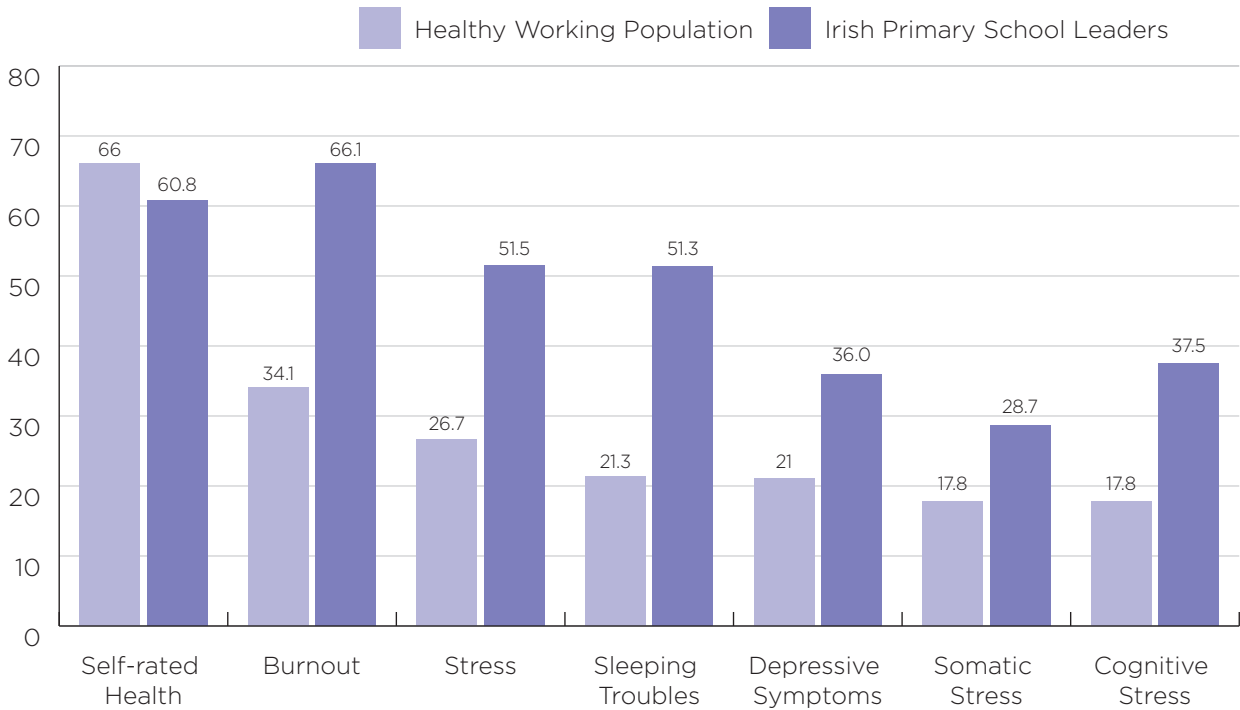


Figure 3 - Health and Wellbeing outcomes of school leaders compared to the healthy working population (2022)

Impact on health and wellbeing

In response to concerns that the increasing complexity and workload demands of school leadership roles are impacting on the health and well-being of Irish school leaders, IPPN commissioned a specific piece of research in partnership with our sister organisation at post-primary level - the National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD).

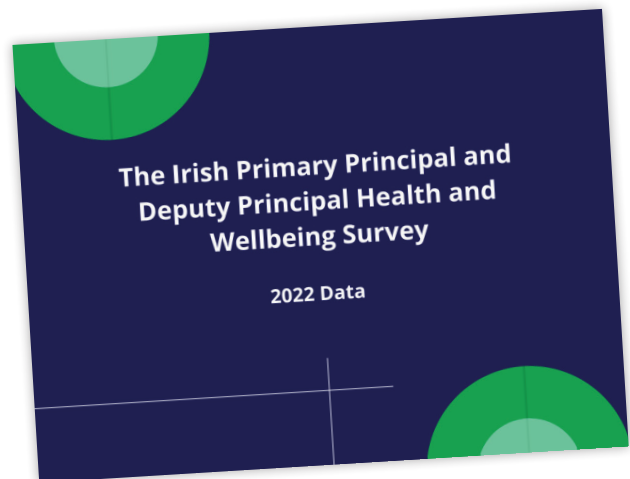
The focus of the research project was on the occupational health, safety and well-being of school leaders in Ireland, and was conducted by a team from Deakin University, Melbourne, in March/April 2022. The data gleaned from this research revealed that the incidence of burnout, stress and depressive symptoms among Irish primary school leaders was almost double that of the healthy working population, and more than double for sleeping troubles and cognitive stress. See Figure 3.

Also notable was that the scores for burnout, stress, sleeping troubles, depressive symptoms, somatic stress and cognitive stress, have all increased since the last study undertaken in 2015. See Table 2.

	2015	2022
Burnout	57.6	66.1
Stress	49.6	51.5
Sleeping troubles	45.4	51.3
Depressive symptoms	33.5	36.0
Somatic stress	23.8	28.7
Cognitive stress	34.2	37.5

Table 2 - Comparison of Health and Wellbeing Outcomes (2015 v 2022)

The two highest sources of stress at work were identical to the top two identified in the 2015 study, namely quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. However, in both cases, the stress rating has increased from 2015.



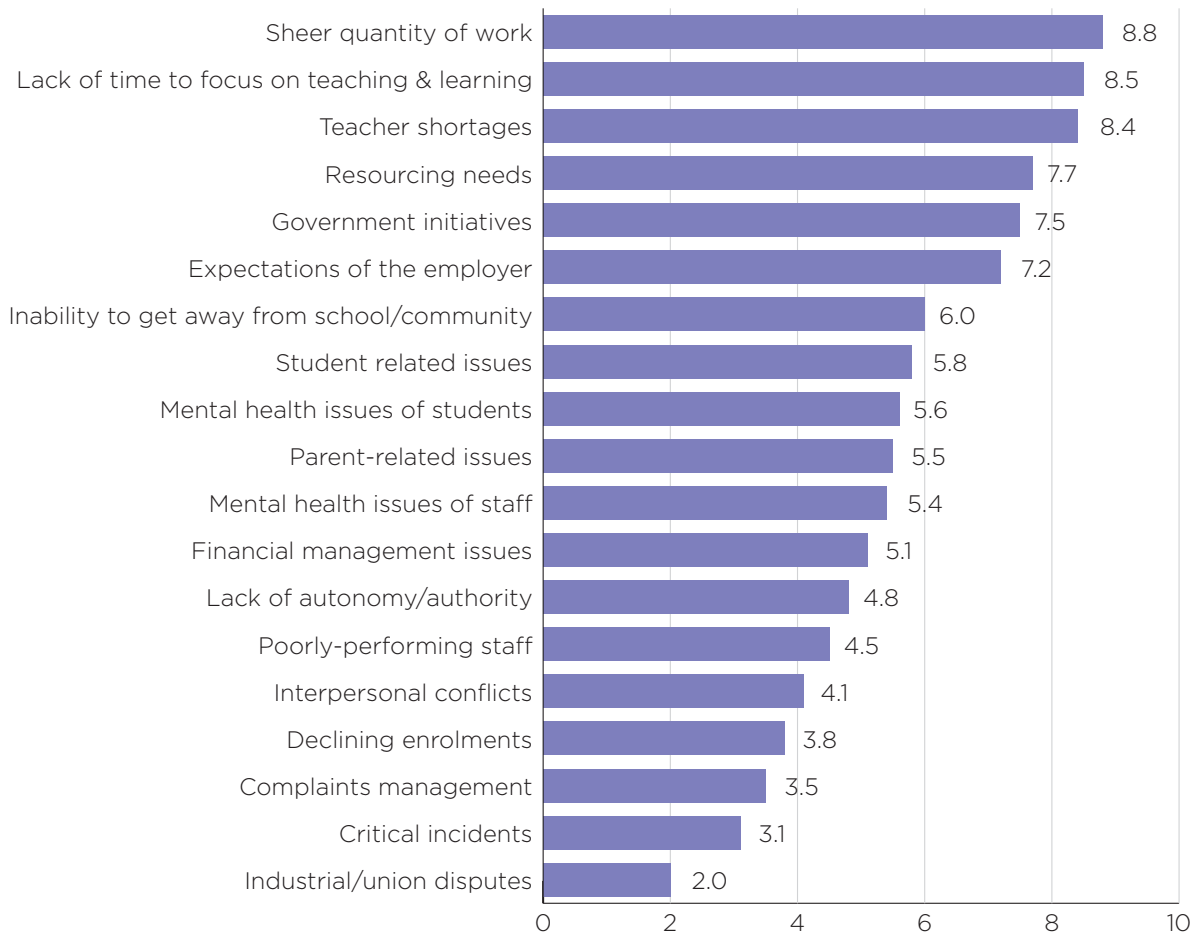


Figure 4 – Sources of stress scores (2022)

It should also be noted that the third highest source of stress is teacher shortages, which has jumped from 13th place on the list of stressors in 2015. Its mean score for stress has more than doubled from 4.1 to 8.4. See Figure 4 above.

Summary statement of findings from analysis of ‘current reality’.

1. The work demands of Irish primary school leaders have consistently increased, year on year
2. The majority of tasks and responsibilities that constitute this workload have little to do with the core purpose of school leaders, which is leading teaching and learning
3. Not being able to do the job they signed up to do, despite their increased workload, is undermining:
 - a. the effectiveness and sustainability of their leadership
 - b. their health and wellbeing.

Key areas considered in the report:

Given the imperative to ensure school leadership of the highest quality in our schools, and a leadership role that is sustainable and less likely to have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of school leaders, in response to these findings, the report considered the following:

- The development of a shared understanding of what constitutes effective school leadership and the core purpose of that leadership
- The extent to which school leaders are deflected from their core purpose by having to take on responsibilities and tasks not related to that purpose
- The skills, knowledge and competencies school leaders require to enable them to be effective
- The need for a systematic process of preparation for leadership and what it might look like
- How the process by which school leaders are recruited could be improved

- How to ensure all school leaders are afforded sufficient time and space to exercise both the leadership and management dimensions to their roles
- How leadership can be shared and supported more effectively in schools
- How the current governance structure in primary schools is impacting on the sustainability of school leadership roles and how that structure could be reimagined.

Conclusion and emerging themes

The report made specific and detailed recommendations in each of its sections, a broad summary of which was included in the Conclusion section of the original report. A more granular analysis of progress on those broader recommendations is contained in this report.

However, three themes emerged which, if addressed, have the potential to have a profound impact on leadership practice in Irish primary schools:

- if school leaders were enabled and empowered to maintain their focus on their core purpose of leading teaching and learning
- if school leaders had greater capacity to share leadership effectively and
- if our schools had a governance structure that had the capacity to meet its onerous statutory and legislative responsibilities,

then there would be greater leadership capacity with our schools, that leadership would be more effective (leading to better outcomes for children) and therefore, those leadership roles would be more sustainable.



Section 2 Actions Undertaken



Dissemination of the Report

The report - *Primary School Leadership: The Case for Urgent Action - A Roadmap to Sustainability* - was launched at the IPPN Principals' Conference in November 2022.

Copies of the report were provided to the Minister for Education, the Secretary General of the Department of Education (DE) and attendees at both the principals' and deputy principals' conferences. The publication was distributed to all IPPN members, to all senior officials within the DE as well as to representatives of all of the education stakeholders and partners.

Engagement with Stakeholders

In order to raise awareness of the content and focus of the project and to progress our advocacy in this regard, meetings were convened, either individually or collectively, with all of the education stakeholders including:

- Secretary General of the DE
- Chief Inspector (both former and current)
- INTO
- The Teaching Council
- Management Bodies
- NPC
- Centre for School Leadership
- NCCA
- NCSE.

There was broad consensus relating to:

- the relevance of the data
- the validity of the analysis
- the current unsustainability of school leadership roles and
- the need for urgent action.

There was, however, some divergence of opinion or a lack of consensus as to what that urgent action should be.

Progress to date on Recommendations

The following matrix details the broad recommendations in the original report and the specific actions that have been undertaken to progress those recommendations.

Recommendation	Actions
Effective leadership and Core Purpose	
The role of the principal and that of the deputy principal should be clearly defined and delineated to better ensure that school leadership can maintain their core focus on leading teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issue raised in all meetings with stakeholders, both individually and collectively ● Funding of research by NUIM on the role of the Deputy Principal
The defining of these roles should be based on a shared understanding of what constitutes effective school leadership in the Irish context and take account of the domains and standards detailed in the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management in <i>LAOS</i> (2022).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Behaviours of effective school leaders identified ● Cross-referenced with domains and standards of the quality framework for leadership and Management
Tasks and responsibilities that are not aligned with that core purpose should be redistributed with a consequential reduction of workload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initiated lobbying campaign to promote the need for consensus on what the focus of school leadership should be ● Survey conducted of professional coaches to elicit objective perspectives in relation to leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability in Irish primary schools.
Preparation for Leadership	
The process of preparation for leadership should be shaped and informed by this clearer understanding of the core purpose of school leadership and should not be generic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highlighted in meetings with CSL / Oide / DE ● Acknowledgement by stakeholders of the need for a three-stage approach to preparation for leadership
There should be three stages in that preparation and induction process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● pre-appointment (aspiring leaders) ● post-appointment but prior to taking up the role (newly-appointed principals) ● after taking up the role (newly-practising principals). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of the pre-commencement module for NAPs to commence in spring/summer 2024 ● Draft leadership portfolio template developed that can be used as part of recruitment process to demonstrate/evaluate leadership capacity
Relevant and specific opportunities and supports for the development of leadership capacity should be made available at each of the three stages, both formally and informally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus of presentation on supports for emerging leadership at the International Confederation of Principals.
Recruitment	
A consistent, national recruitment and appointment process should be developed, underpinned by the principles of HR best practice, and supported by mandatory training for those engaged in recruitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of a recruitment portal within educationposts.ie to minimise the administrative burden arising from recruitment and to better ensure procedural compliance and data protection.

Recommendation	Actions
Time and Space to Lead	
<p>Additional and sufficient release time for teaching principals and deputy principals should be sanctioned to better ensure their capacity to discharge their leadership and management duties and to better facilitate a collaborative, co-leadership approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issue raised in all meetings with stakeholders ● Specifically raised in meeting with Chief Inspector ● Specific focus of IPPN Budget 2024 submission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Restoration of release days for DPs ■ A quantum of leadership days to be allocated for schools to use as fits their context ■ Administrative status to be determined by number of staff as opposed to number of pupils ■ A graduated approach to the provision of leadership and management time for leaders of schools who do not meet the threshold for administrative status. ■ Need for specific, targeted, additional support for leaders of Special Schools ● Administrative status for all DPs in Special Schools -achieved in Budget 2024 ● Pilot Administrative Officer role, supporting a cluster of schools within the Small Schools' Action Research project, to create time and space for school leaders to focus on the leadership of teaching and learning.
<p>Administrative status as a principal or deputy principal should be based on the number of staff that are being led and managed, and not on the number of children enrolled in the school.</p>	
<p>All schools should have access to an adequate level of administrative support provided by staff who are appropriately skilled and remunerated.</p>	
<p>Greater account should be taken of the leadership demands of the different school contexts and supports and resources should be tailored to assist in meeting those demands – a 'one size fits all' or generic approach does not work.</p>	
Sharing and Supporting Leadership	
<p>There should be a mandatory preparation and induction programme for newly-appointed and newly-practising deputy principals, with access for all deputy principals to rigorous and relevant mentoring and coaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need for access to mentoring and coaching for newly appointed deputy principals highlighted in stakeholder meetings ● Pilot group mentoring scheme for newly appointed deputy principals initiated by IPPN in autumn 2023 ● Call for removal of barriers to leadership teams getting access to team coaching ● Survey of members conducted to assess the extent to which a culture of shared leadership exists in schools and to identify obstacles to the further embedding of such a culture ● Presentations on the key importance of shared leadership made to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSL Learning day ■ Forbairt and Tánaiste programmes ● Pilot shared learning day planned for spring 2024 - opportunity for the principal and deputy principal of a school to attend together as a senior leadership team.
<p>At post-primary level, the threshold for the appointment of extra deputy principals has changed, reflecting the extra demands now on leadership at that level. Primary school leadership should also be examined with a view to similar provision being made.</p>	
<p>Professional development should be provided to leadership teams to foster and embed a culture of shared leadership in all schools. This should include, but not be limited to, access for all school leadership and management teams to professional development on how to optimise collaborative practice, and the provision of team coaching.</p>	

Recommendation	Actions
Governance	
A review of the role and structure of Boards of Management should be undertaken, as a matter of urgency, prior to the formation of new Boards in 2023.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting with Secretary General to highlight the need for a review of the current governance structure ● Consistently raised in the review process of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools ● Meetings of stakeholders convened to explore the need for review. ● Follow-up meetings held with individual stakeholders to discuss concerns ● Specific proposals made with regard to the piloting of modified governance structures ● Exploring practical implementation of same within the confines of the Small Schools' Action Research project ● Collaboration with stakeholders to agree and document the responsibilities falling to Boards from the provisions of the Governance Manual.
A clear distinction between the governance function of the Board of Management and the leadership and management of the school should be made.	
Boards should be constituted and operate in accordance with governance best practice including, but not limited to, mandatory training for all Board members, specific roles for each Board member and rotation of membership to ensure some continuity.	
Legal, financial, human resource, health and safety, and building/maintenance expertise should be available on a cluster or regional basis to all schools or through a meso-level structure. Strategic leverage of a digital infrastructure and regional hubs could achieve this; opportunities in this regard exist post-Covid.	

Supplementary actions

A presentation on Emerging and Sustainable Leadership was made by IPPN in October 2023 to the conference of the International Confederation of Principals (ICP), which is the global body for the national professional associations of school leaders. Following plenary discussion, a global call to action on the issue of Sustainable Leadership is being framed.

IPPN also participated in a discussion on the issue of Sustainable Leadership as part of the General Assembly of the European School Heads' Association (ESHA), which is an international network for European school leaders. This resulted

in a joint letter being sent to all European policy-makers in the area of education to advocate for sustainable leadership which states:

“
‘We seek specific support for strategies that enable sustainable leadership in areas of wellbeing, advice, support, stress, and health issues for school leaders themselves, to prevent burnout, in order that the role of school leader is something people will continue to aspire to and feel able to sustain and develop in the role over time’.
 ”

Section 3 Latest Evidence



Overview of the Latest Evidence

Analysis of circulars/policy guidelines issued since the report was published

An analysis was undertaken of circulars, policy guidelines and related publications that have issued since the publication of the report in November 2022, to ascertain what tasks and responsibilities are ascribed to school leaders and what impact, if any, they have had on work demands/workload. The tasks and responsibilities were further analysed with reference to the domains of the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management. While 50 primary sector circulars have issued since the report was published, circulars that are

published annually were not counted as they have been factored into the analysis undertaken last year. Accordingly, a total of 31 documents were analysed this year. See Table 3.

The analysis of the documents, and the tasks and responsibilities contained therein, highlighted some positive trends including:

- a far higher proportion of the documents including tasks and responsibilities relating to Leading Teaching and Learning (45% this year versus 25% last year) and
- some of the documents did not have tasks and responsibilities relating to Managing the Organisation (90% this year versus 100% last year).

Leadership and Management Domain	Number of the 31 documents/ circulars analysed that have duties that fall into each domain	% of the 31 documents/ circulars analysed that have duties that fall into each domain
Leading Teaching and Learning	14	45%
Managing the Organisation	28	90%
Leading School Development	4	13%
Developing Leadership Capacity	3	10%

Table 3 - Analysis of work tasks identified within circulars, policy guidelines, etc. 2023

It is also noteworthy that the Free School Books initiative acknowledged the need to create additional capacity within schools to implement/administer the scheme with the inclusion of an infrastructural support fund. This is a welcome development, as it is a recognition that in order for any policy initiative to be effectively implemented, sufficient capacity must exist within the leadership of schools. Failure to ensure that capacity directly compromises the effective roll-out of policy initiatives.

However, the analysis also confirms the continuing expansion of the role with the additional tasks and responsibilities identified within the documents. It further confirms a continuing disproportionate emphasis on managing the organisation. The extent to which the breadth and nature of this expanding workload impact on the sustainability of leadership roles and the health and wellbeing of school leaders is detailed in the subsequent sections.



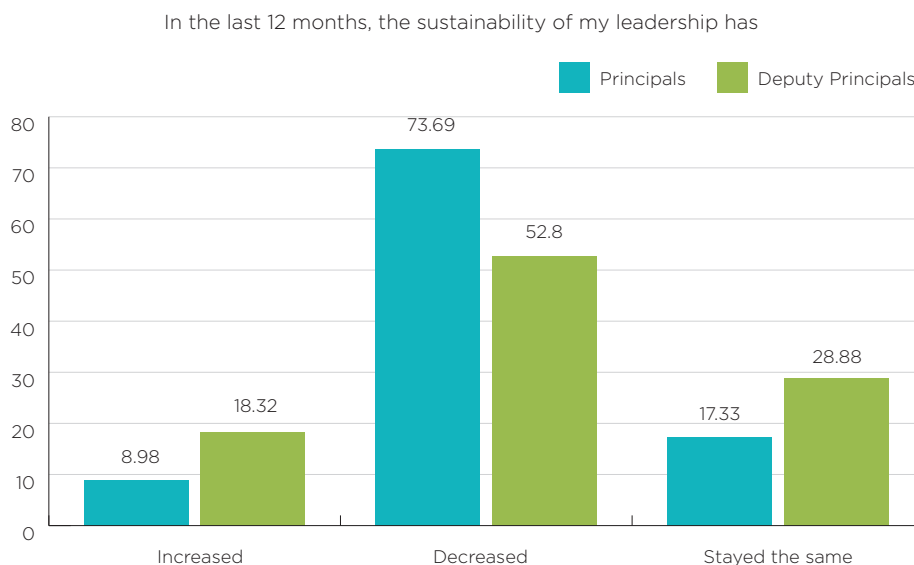


Figure 5 - Impact on leadership sustainability in the last 12 months

Data gleaned from surveys of members (Principals and Deputy Principals)

In order to ensure the ongoing monitoring of the sustainability of school leadership roles, and to gain further insights into the experience and impact of the practice of that leadership, we surveyed our members in September 2023. Separate surveys were issued to principals and deputy principals. To date, over 1,500 school leaders have responded to those surveys and their responses have provided rich data.

In 2022, the mean score (out of 10) for how principals rated the sustainability of their roles was 3.96. In our 2023 survey, a majority of principals (74%) indicated that the sustainability of their leadership has decreased in the intervening 12 months, with only 9% of respondents reporting an increase. While there was no equivalent

mean score for how deputy principals rated the sustainability of their roles, it should be noted that a majority (53%) also indicated that the sustainability of their leadership has decreased in the intervening 12 months, with 18% reporting an increase. See Figure 5.

This decrease in sustainability is reflected in the leadership sustainability mean score for all principals dropping to 3.61. Principals of Special Schools rated the sustainability of their roles at just 3.54 out of 10. Principals of DEIS Schools rated their sustainability at 3.62 out of 10, down from 3.76 in 2022. Of particular concern is the mean score reported by teaching principals, which has dropped from 3.53 to 3.18 in the last 12 months. Deputy principals rate the sustainability of their roles at 5.34 out of 10. See Figure 6.

How school leaders rate the sustainability of their leadership role

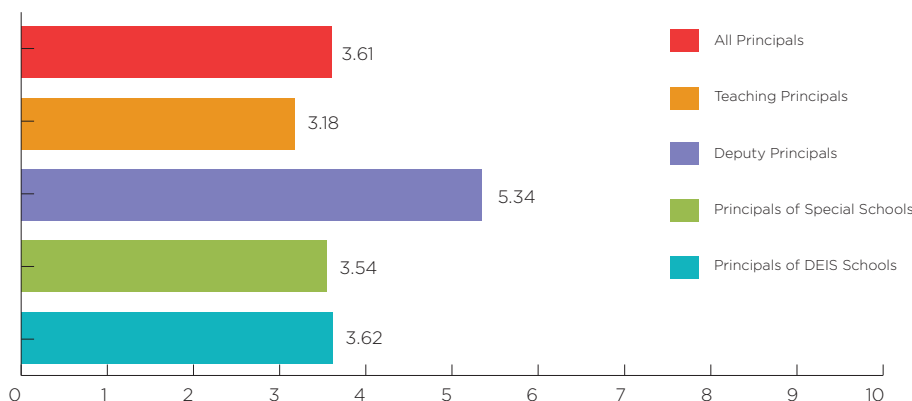


Figure 6 - Sustainability ratings of Principals and Deputy Principals 2023

In corroboration of the key themes that emerged from the Sustainable Leadership report, 95% of principals and 94% of deputy principals agreed that an ability to focus on their core purpose would enhance their leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. See Figures 7 and 8

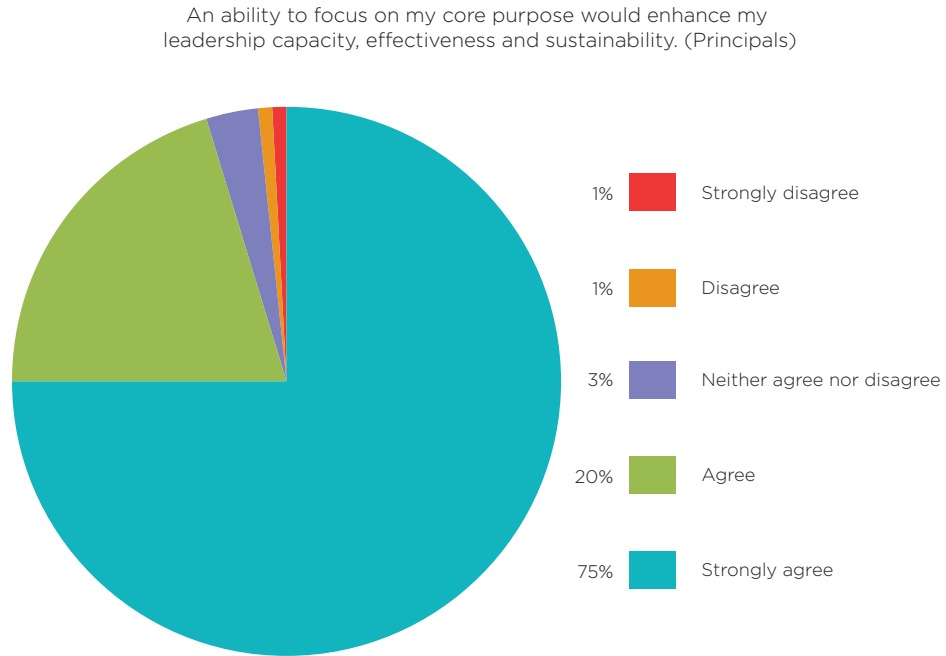


Figure 7 - Focus on core purpose - Principals

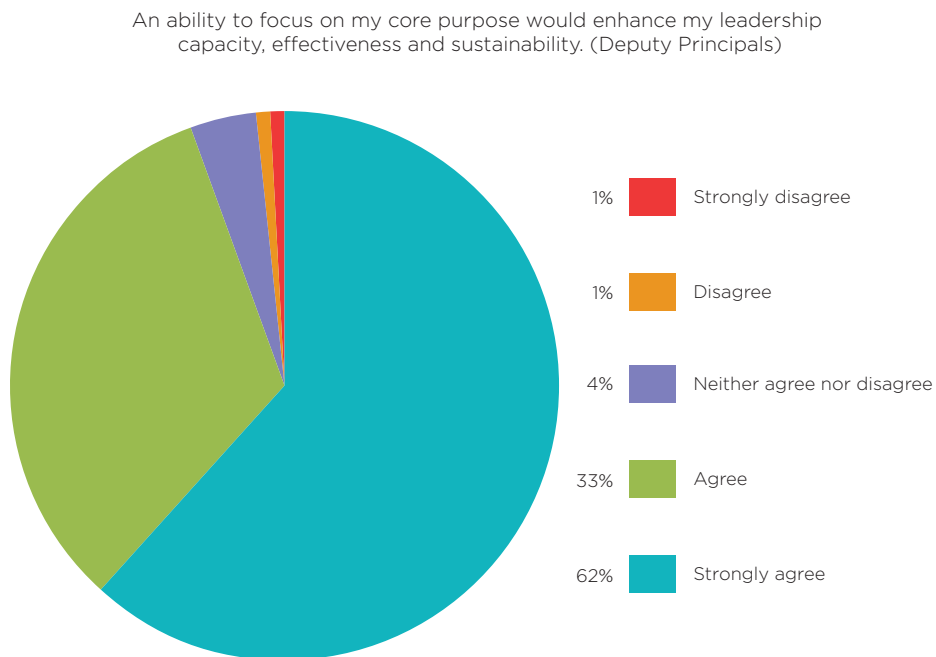


Figure 8 - Focus on core purpose - Deputy Principals

Similar corroboration of the key themes was provided when 95% of principals and 93% of deputy principals agreed that an increased capacity to share leadership would enhance their own leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. See Figures 9 and 10.

An increased capacity to share leadership would enhance my own leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. (Principals)

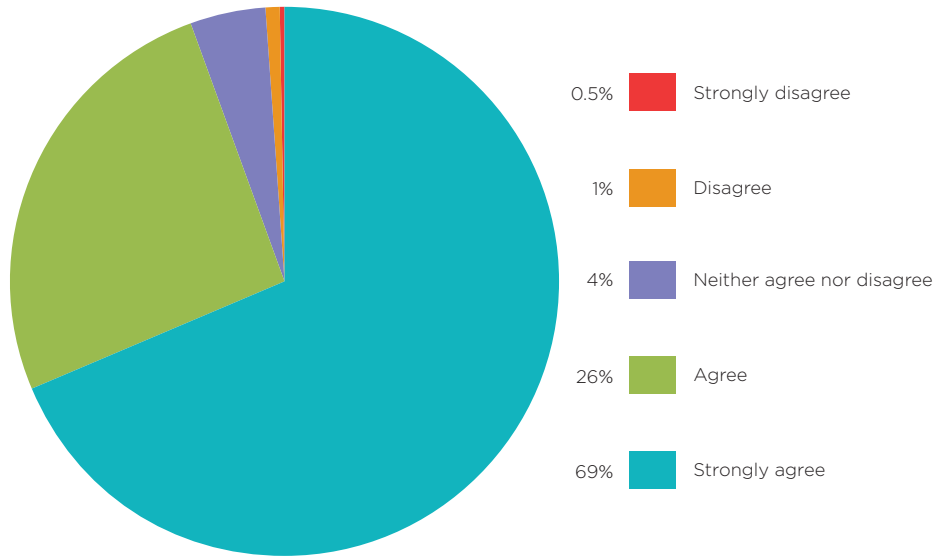


Figure 9 - Capacity to share leadership - Principals

An increased capacity to share leadership would enhance my own leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability.

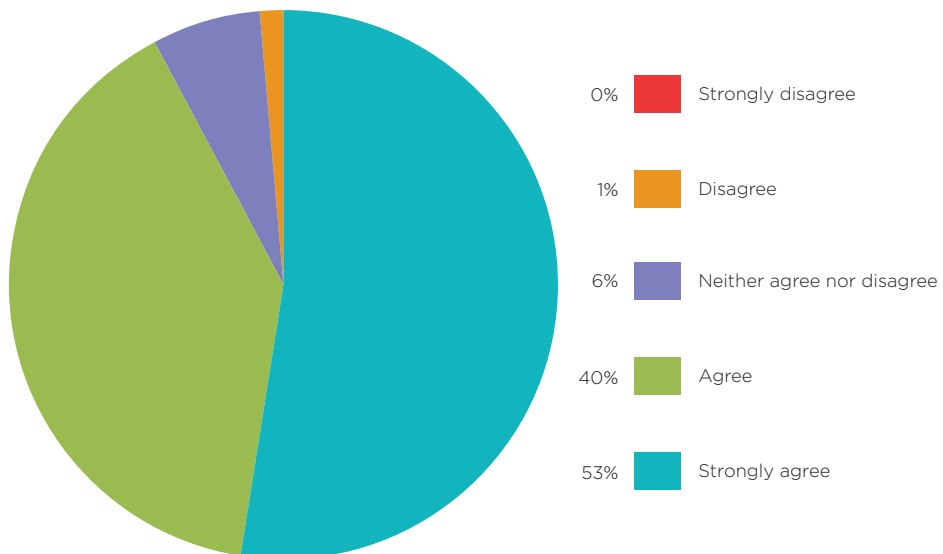


Figure 10 - Capacity to share leadership - Deputy Principals

There is clear evidence of proactivity on the part of school leaders with regard to the development of a culture of shared leadership within schools. Key to the development of such a culture is a co-leadership or partnership approach between the principal and deputy principal as it models what shared leadership looks like in practice for other staff members. In this regard, it is encouraging that 74% of principals and 81% of deputy principals report the existence of such a co-leadership approach in their schools. See Figure 11.

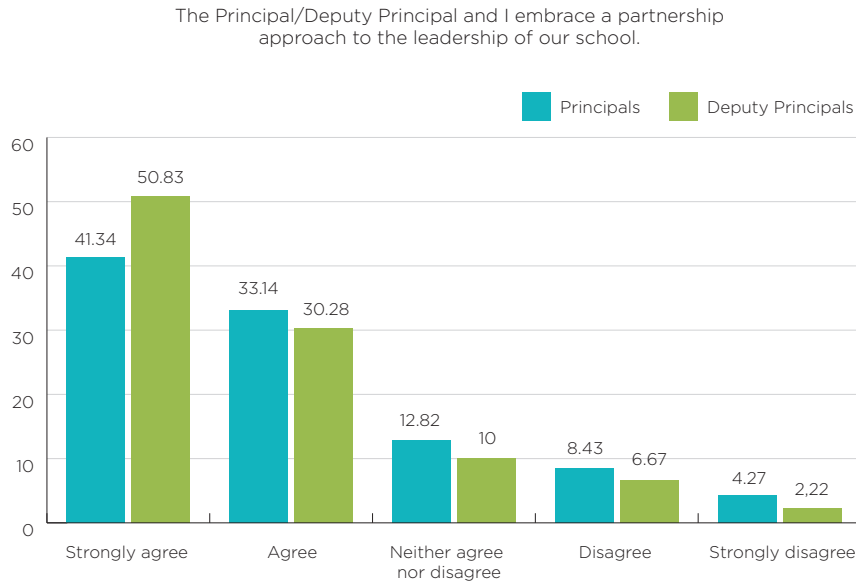


Figure 11 - Perspectives on co-leadership/partnership of Principals and Deputy Principals

It is noteworthy, however, that the greatest impediment to the development of a partnership approach is identified as a lack of time due to the teaching commitments of the deputy principal and/or the principal. 84% of deputy principals and 78% of principals cite this lack of time as an impediment, which is understandable given that 51% of principals are teaching principals and 98% of deputy principals have full-time teaching duties. See Figure 12.

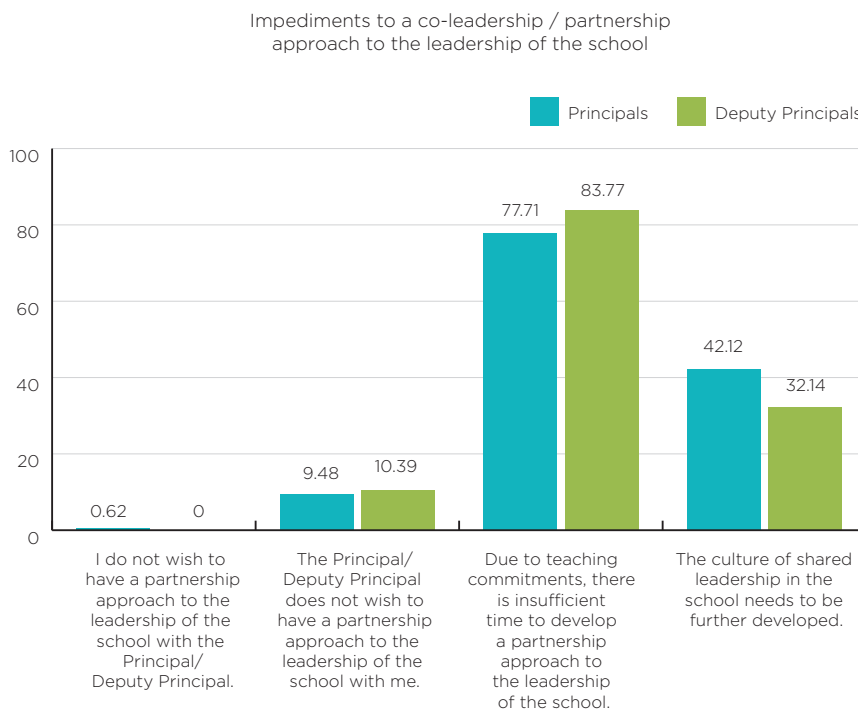


Figure 12 - Impediments co-leadership/partnership approach

It is similarly indicative of the proactive work happening in schools around the development of the shared culture of leadership that 62% of principals and 70% of deputy principals believe that the members of their leadership and management teams see leadership as a shared responsibility. See Figure 13.

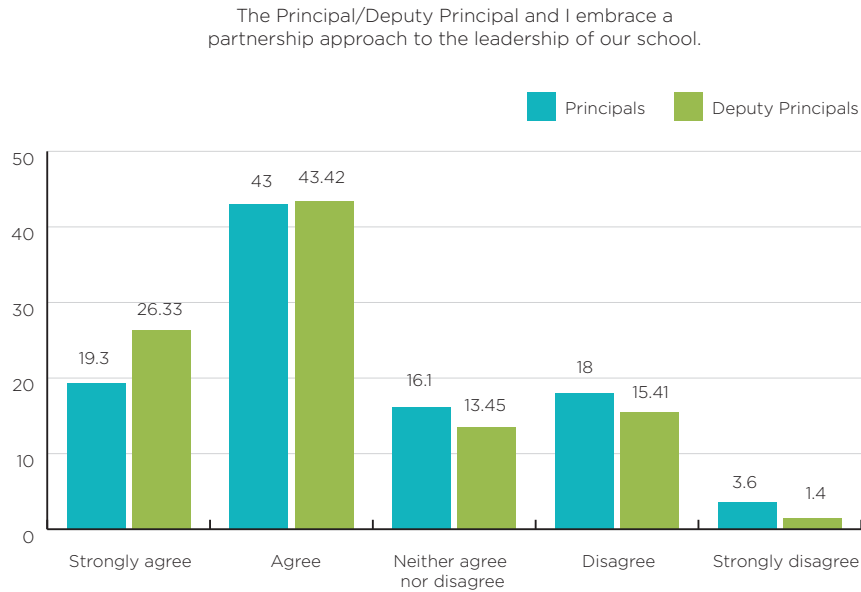


Figure 13 - Perspectives on leadership as a shared responsibility

Unsurprisingly, however, principals (76%) and deputy principals (81%) identify the lack of time, due to teaching commitments, as the greatest impediment to the leadership and management team seeing the leadership of the school as a shared responsibility. It is also noteworthy that a continued focus on duties and responsibilities, as opposed to leadership, is identified as an issue in schools by 54% of principals and 49% of deputy principals. Both principals (39%) and deputy principals (35%) also highlight the need for the further development of that culture of shared leadership in schools. See Figure 14.

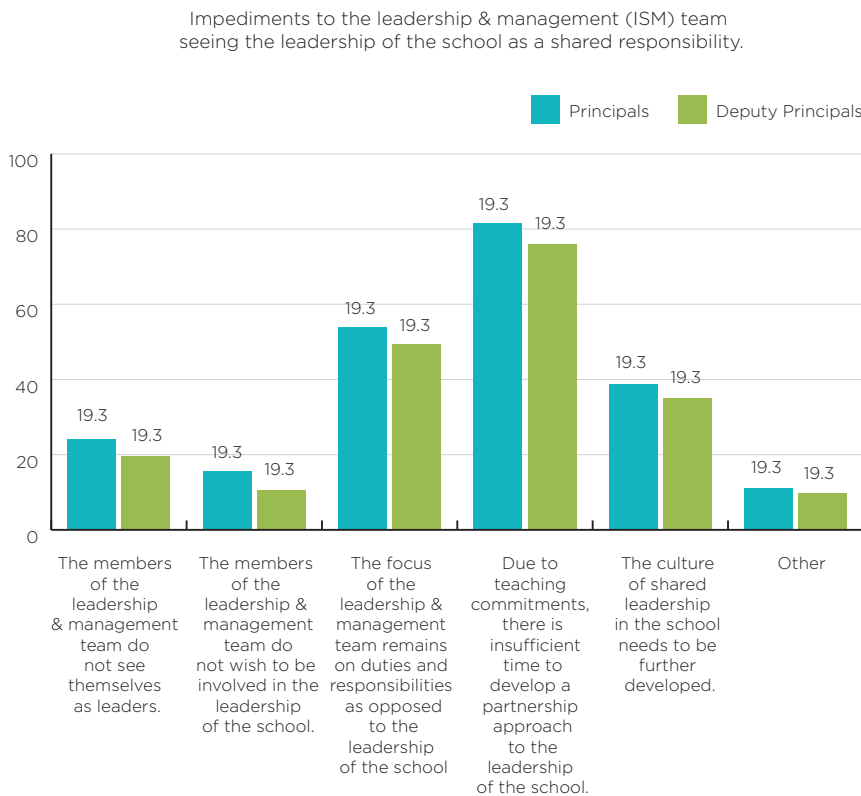


Figure 14 - Impediments to the leadership being shared more effectively



In terms of what would be helpful to further develop and embed a culture of shared leadership, both principals and deputy principals identified ‘release’ time from teaching duties for deputy principals, and greater release time for teaching principals, as measures that would have the most positive impact. See Table 4.

	Deputy Principals	Principals
Release time for the deputy principal	91% (N/A = 9%)	87% (N/A = 9%)
More release time for the principal	50% (N/A = 43%)	57% (N/A = 40%)
Coaching for the deputy principal	86%	78%
Coaching for the principal	76%	84%
Team coaching	83%	80%
Engagement with Forbairt	79%	75%
Mentoring for the deputy principal	82%	79%

Table 4 - What would assist the further development of a culture of shared leadership

It should be further noted that when the responses of principals are filtered for just those of teaching principals, 96% of that cohort identified more release time as key to this dynamic.

The issue of leadership capacity in schools can be further analysed with reference to the number of leadership and management (L&M) days that are allocated to primary schools, based on the number of pupils in the school and the status, teaching or administrative, of the principal and deputy principal.

The enormous disparity in leadership capacity between a school with 168 pupils and 169 pupils, as well a similarly large disparity between schools with 572 pupils and 573 pupils, highlights the need for a more nuanced and graduated approach. See Figure 15.

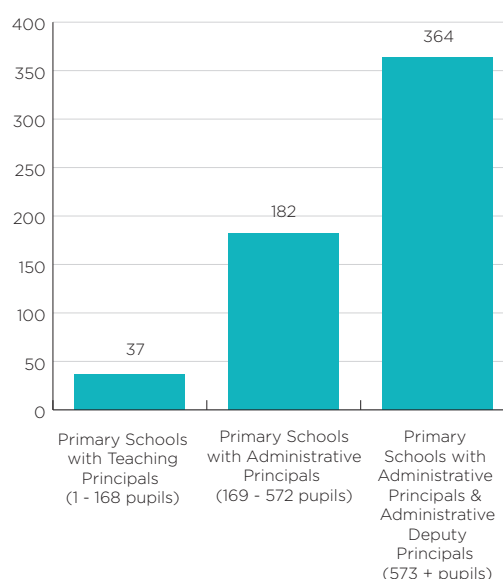


Figure 15 - Leadership and management days allocated to primary school

A comparison between the number of leadership and management days allocated to primary schools and post-primary schools with equivalent numbers of pupils is also instructive. See Figure 16.

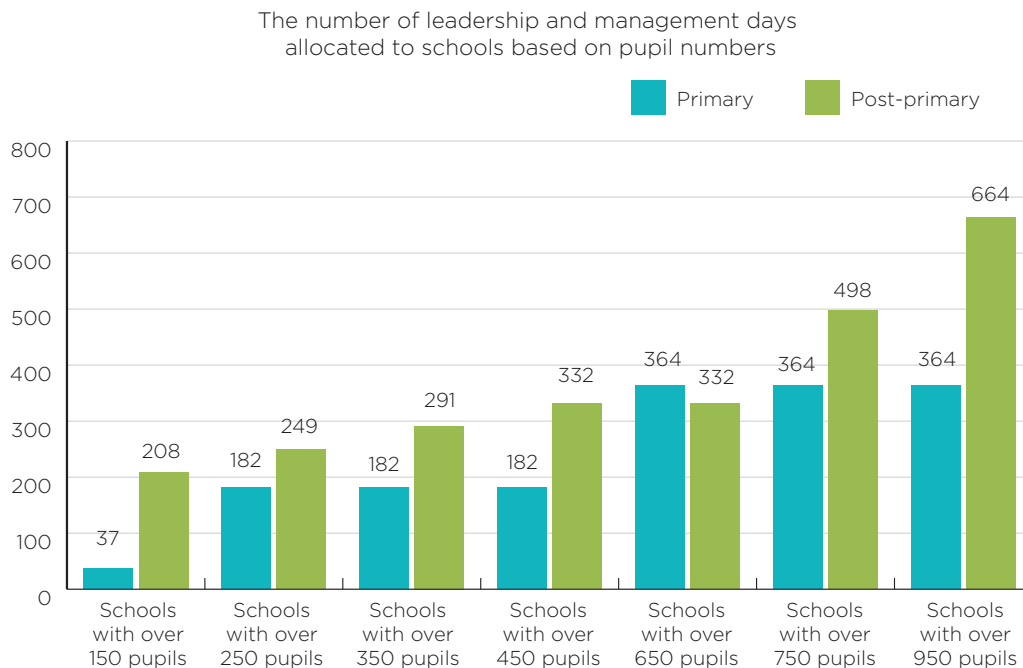


Figure 16 – Comparison of leadership and management days allocated to primary and post-primary schools

It is noteworthy that 95% of principals and 99% of deputy principals agree that having more autonomy around the use of leadership and management days would enhance leadership effectiveness in their schools. For example, having a fixed number of leadership days allocated to the school based on the number of staff in the school, to free up members of leadership and management team, as fits the needs of the school. See Figure 17.

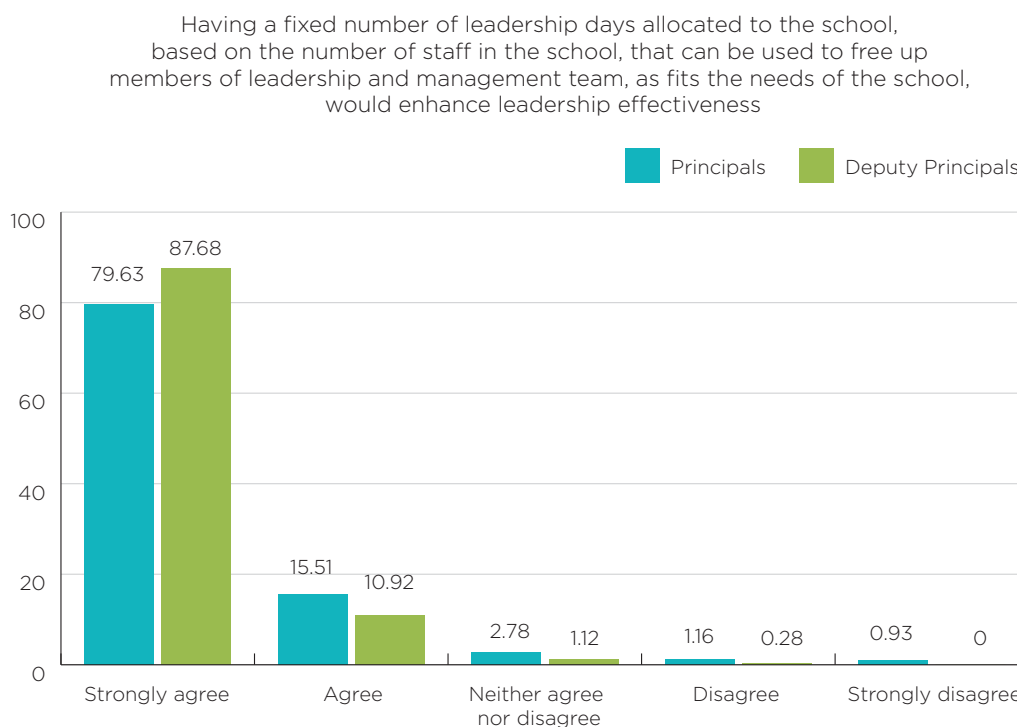


Figure 17 – Perspectives on the concept of leadership days

Despite the positive steps being taken in the area of partnership and the wider sharing of leadership within schools, it remains a cause for some concern with regard to succession planning that deputy principals do not aspire to the role of principal. In response to a question seeking to ascertain whether they would apply for the role of principal in their school, if it became available, 81% of deputy principals indicated that they would not apply. See Figure 18.

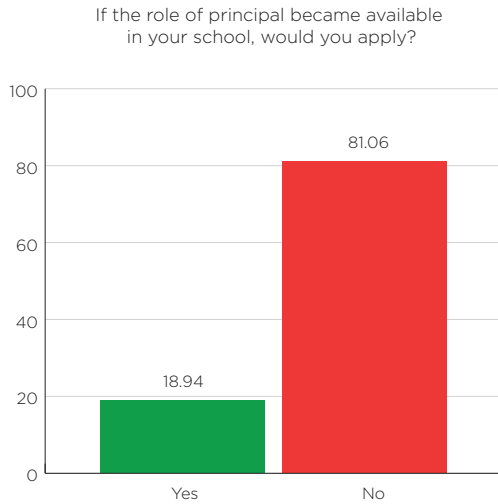


Figure 18 – Perspectives of deputy principals as to whether they would apply for the role of principal in their school

This is in keeping with findings from the Misneach programme where newly appointed principals (primary and post-primary) in the last two years

were surveyed. At primary level, only 27% of newly appointed principals had served as deputy principal. This is in stark contrast to the post-primary sector, where 77% of newly appointed principals had served as deputy principals. It begs the question, what are the key differences driving this discrepancy between the sectors?

Deputy principals also told us why they would not apply for the role of primary principal, with:

- 74% saying that taking on the role of principal would likely have an adverse impact on their work/life balance
- 70% saying that taking on the role of principal would likely have an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing, and
- 59% saying that they did not want the additional workload and responsibility.

Key findings from the 2023 Deakin data

Year 2 of the three-year longitudinal study of the health and wellbeing of Irish school leaders was undertaken in the spring of 2023 with the issuing of the survey to primary and post-primary principals and deputy principals. The longitudinal nature of the research allows for the analysis of trends and provides comparative data year on year with regard to the health and wellbeing outcomes of school leaders in Ireland.

The research team issued their findings in a report in October 2023. Figure 19 below details the 2023 scores for primary school leaders in comparison to those of the healthy working population. Four

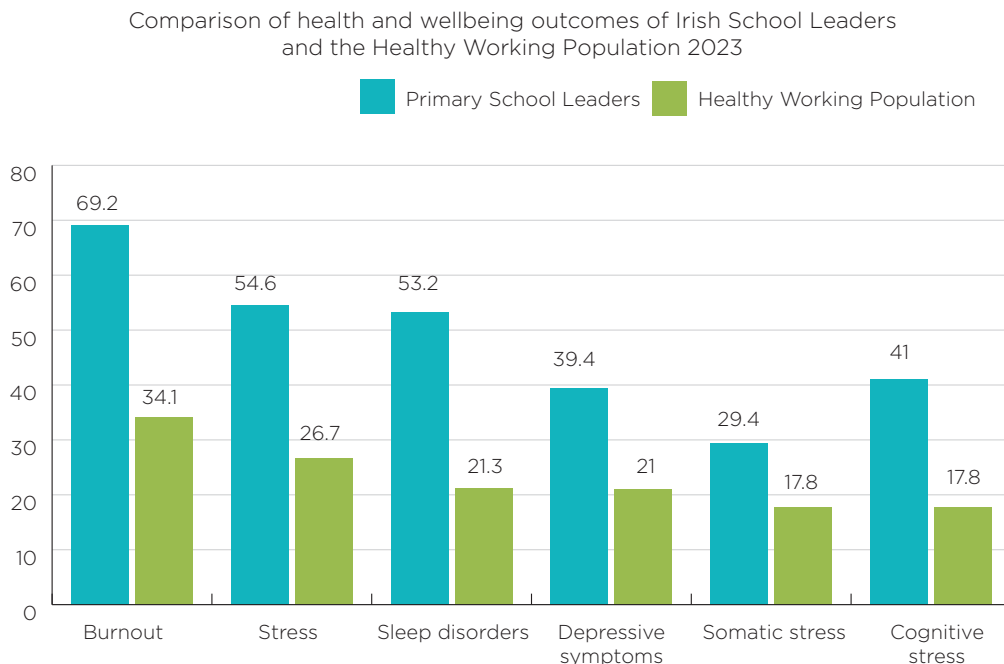


Figure 19 - Health and Wellbeing outcomes of school leaders compared to the healthy working population (2023)

of the six negative well-being scores (burnout, stress, sleep disorders and cognitive stress) are now more than double those of the healthy working population. As was the case in 2022, the most elevated score and the one of most concern is burnout. The mean score is approaching 70, with 54% of primary school leaders now being

identified as being within the severe or high categories of burnout.

Table 5 below details the steady deterioration of the negative health and wellbeing scores since 2015. This deterioration prompted the researchers to conclude in the 2023 report that:

“

‘The results demonstrate that urgent action to reduce principal workload is required. While reviews of workload are welcome, the results in this report demonstrate that the current design and scope of the principal and deputy principal role is unsustainable. Given that the organisation of principals’ and deputy principals’ work and their working conditions are heavily influenced by actors, policies and processes beyond the school, it is critical that policymakers and systems administrators take responsibility for leading the development of more healthy and sustainable systems. Principal workload is unlikely to be reduced without removing responsibilities from principals, especially administrative duties, through the addition of staffing, and resources, an appropriate governance structure, and the redesign of the principal role. The Government should work in consultation with IPPN, NAPD and other key stakeholders to develop a strategy to reduce principal workload. The strategy should include concrete actions that respond to school leaders’ needs and priorities, and a mechanism to assess the efficacy of these actions. Baseline workload data could be drawn from the current report.’

”

	2015	2022	2023
Burnout	57.6	66.1	69.2
Stress	49.6	51.5	54.6
Sleeping troubles	45.4	51.3	53.2
Depressive symptoms	33.5	36.0	39.4
Somatic stress	23.8	28.7	29.4
Cognitive stress	34.2	37.5	41.0

Table 5 - Comparison of Health and Wellbeing Outcomes (2015 v 2022 v 2023)

With regard to the Sources of Stress scores detailed in Figure 20 below, the top two sources of stress remain unchanged - *Sheer quantity of work* and *Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning* - which tallies with the feedback from IPPN's member survey and our analysis of workload. These have been the top two sources of stress since 2015 but, in both cases, the mean stress score has increased since 2022. Of the 19 identified sources of stress, the mean stress score has increased for 14 of them, stayed the same in two instances, and decreased in three instances. See Figure 20.

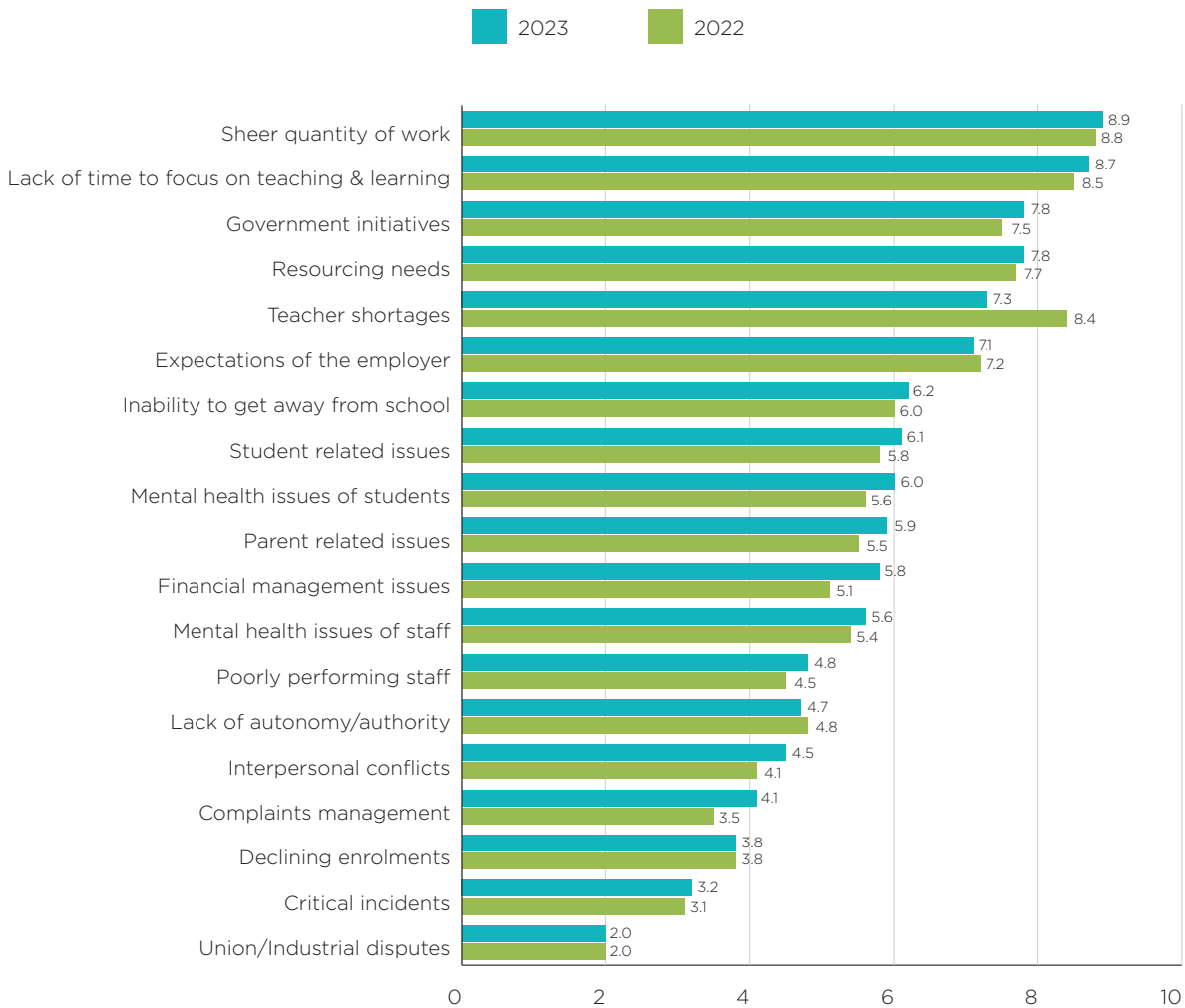


Figure 20 - Comparison of sources of stress scores (2022 v 2023)

The findings of the survey also highlight the increased and elevated work demands that school leaders experience (in excess of those of the healthy working population), which tally with IPPN’s own analysis of workload previously detailed in this progress report. See Figure 21.

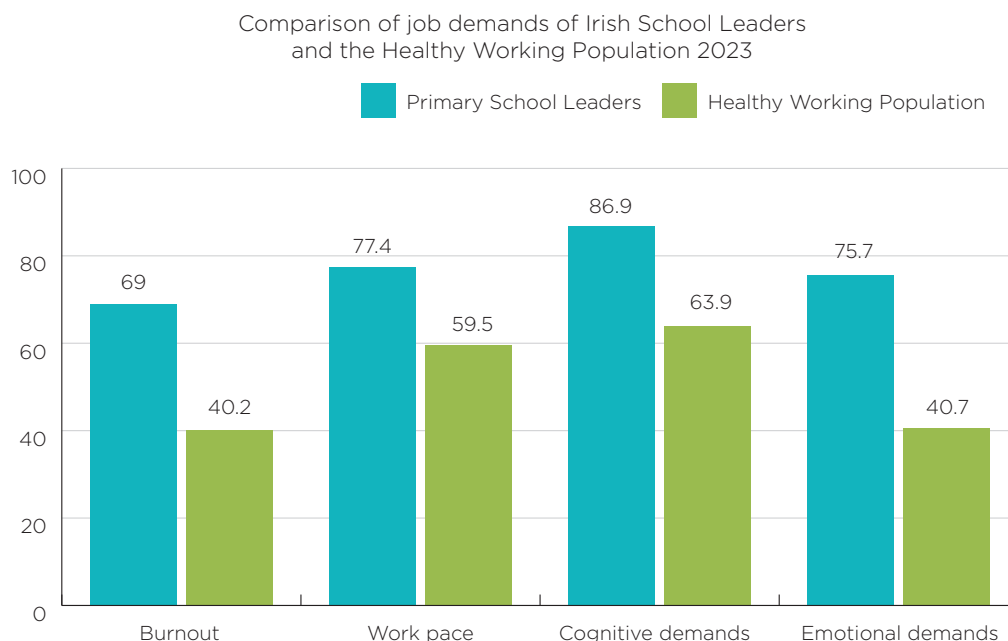


Figure 21 - Job demands of school leaders compared to the healthy working population (2023)

The researchers conclude that -

“

‘Irish primary school leaders find themselves in challenging work settings marked by complex job roles and intense demands. The leaders identified administrative tasks as consuming much of their work hours, often overshadowing essential roles such as curriculum development, student engagement, and staff management. Compared to 2022 and the benchmarks set for a healthy working population, the demands on school leaders have intensified in 2023. There is a noticeable increase in both the volume of work (quantitative demands) and the speed at which they are expected to perform (work pace). Additionally, school leaders have reported higher cognitive and emotional strain, reflecting the broader trend of a more stressful work environment.’

“

Summary of responses from the professional coaches working with school leaders and leadership teams

As previously referenced, the focus of IPPN’s work is the enhancement of leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. To get an objective, external perspective on this, we sought to garner the views of the professional coaches who have been working with individual school leaders and with school leadership teams over the past several years through the Centre of School Leadership, now Oide Leadership. It was IPPN’s

view that establishing what themes have emerged in relation to leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability from this work would be profoundly impactful in terms of shaping and challenging our thinking and our advocacy.

To that end, we asked the professional coaches to complete a short two-question survey. The following is a summary of their response to those questions.

Question 1 - From your interactions with school leaders and school leadership teams, mindful of the current context in which leadership is practised, what perspectives/issues have emerged with regard to leadership capacity, leadership effectiveness and leadership sustainability in Irish primary schools?

From the survey responses provided, several main themes emerge regarding the challenges faced by school leaders. They are as follows:

1. Workload and time management:

Respondents mention the overwhelming workload of school leaders as a central concern, referencing the breadth of tasks and responsibilities that fall to school leaders. The time drain and opportunity costs associated with these tasks are significant issues.

2. The lack of capacity to share leadership:

The need for an effective leadership team is highlighted. Where strong leadership teams exist, the workload can be distributed more effectively, which supports leadership capacity, effectiveness, and sustainability. Struggles in recruiting a leadership team are also mentioned as challenges.

3. Community and external pressures:

Respondents note that issues from the community can spill into schools, requiring immediate responses from principals. This external pressure can be time-consuming and divert resources from other tasks. Dealing with bullying, particularly when amplified by social media platforms, is identified as a specific challenge.

4. Training and skills:

The need for specific skills, such as coaching skills, is mentioned to address some of the challenges, like dealing with interpersonal conflicts and bullying. The lack of training and support for new principals in this regard is seen as a hindrance to effectively managing their workload.

These themes collectively reflect the multifaceted challenges and responsibilities that school leaders encounter in their roles. Addressing these challenges may require a combination of better support systems, training, and strategies for time management and community engagement.

Question 2 - In your view, what is the one action or support that, if implemented, would have the most positive impact in terms of enhancing leadership capacity, leadership effectiveness and leadership sustainability in Irish primary schools?

The key suggestions for positively impacting school leadership, as derived from the survey responses, can be summarised as follows:

1. Reduce workload:

The most straightforward and direct suggestion is to reduce the workload of school leaders. This implies a need for streamlining responsibilities or re-evaluating the tasks assigned to leaders to ensure they are manageable.

2. Clearly-defined job specifications:

To reduce ambiguity and align expectations, there is a suggestion for clearly defining and communicating realistic job specifications for school leaders. This would help them and others to better understand the scope and boundaries of their roles and responsibilities.

3. Reduction in paperwork and an increase in funding:

Respondents emphasise the importance of reducing paperwork, which is often seen as time-consuming and detracting from more impactful leadership tasks. Additionally, increased funding is suggested, as likely to help schools allocate resources more effectively and reduce financial stress.

4. Training and coaching for new school leaders:

New school leaders (principals and deputy principals) require training and ongoing coaching support. The feedback indicates that having an independent third party as a 'thinking partner' is valuable. Furthermore, coaching skills are considered beneficial for interactions with staff, parents, and the community.

In summary, the key suggestions to positively impact school leadership revolve around reducing workload through various means, improving training and coaching, and providing clear job specifications. These recommendations aim to alleviate some of the challenges and pressures faced by school leaders, ultimately enabling them to be more effective in their roles.

Section 4 Conclusion



Conclusion

There is clear evidence that the workload of primary school leaders is expanding year on year with a disproportionate focus of the tasks and responsibilities that make up that workload being on managing the organisation. School leaders report that this is consistently diverting them from their core purpose of leading teaching and learning. Consequently, leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability are being undermined. It is also clearly impacting negatively on the health and wellbeing of those school leaders.

This has significant implications for the effective implementation of any new initiative and policy directive. It also has clear implications for aspiring and emerging leadership. But, most importantly, it has implications for school effectiveness and, ultimately, outcomes for children.

IPPN readily acknowledges the significant investment that has been made by the DE in supports for school leadership. Such supports have been provided in the form of subvention of fees for the post-graduate diploma in school leadership; access to mentoring for newly appointed principals; access to coaching for established principals; and access to team

coaching for school leadership teams, subject to the principal having first engaged in one-to-one coaching. These complement the professional development for leadership opportunities provided by the Misneach, Tánaiste, Forbairt and Comhar programmes.

These are positive developments that impact on leadership capacity and effectiveness. However, the extent of that impact is limited by the lack of clarity surrounding school leadership roles and their current unsustainability. Two key questions need to be asked in this context. Firstly, for what role are we preparing aspiring school leaders? Secondly, how effective can supports for newly appointed and existing principals be if their role is ill-defined and untenable?

The Revised Primary Curriculum Framework emphasises the importance of ‘student agency’ and ‘teacher agency’. Effective teachers create an

environment and culture within their classrooms that empower that student agency. Similarly, effective school leaders create an environment in their schools that empowers teacher agency. It is imperative that the system creates an equivalent culture and environment - the ‘conducive conditions’ identified by the NCCA - that will empower the leadership agency required to deliver the most effective schools.

Central to that process will be reaching consensus on what it is that we want our school leaders to be doing in their role. That role clarity needs to be shaped around the behaviours of effective school leaders, many of which are evident within the statements of effective and highly effective practice in the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management. We need to give school leaders the opportunity of doing not only the job they signed up to do, but the job that we want them to be doing.

“

*Change is inevitable, change will always happen, but you have to apply direction to change, and that's when it's **progress**.*

DOUG BALDWIN

”

Analysis of Circulars

Circular	LAOS Domains	Principal's Responsibility
0063/2022 Joint Data Controller Arrangement between Payroll Division, Department of Education and The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM
0070/2022 Enhancement to Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for student support where relevant Apply for advisory support where relevant
0075/2022 Commencement of the Education (Provision in respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Act 2022 and Commencement of remaining sections of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Admissions Policy Implement same
0077/2022 Once-off cost of living measure to support increased school running costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Adjust Budget accordingly
0078/2022 Bereavement Leave Scheme for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process application Secure substitute cover
00079/2022 Bereavement Leave Scheme for Special Needs Assistants employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process application Secure substitute cover Organise Garda Vetting
0017/2023 Primary Curriculum Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation Leading School Development Developing Leadership Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise CPD Plan implementation of Primary Curriculum Framework

Circular	LAOS Domains	Principal's Responsibility
0021/2023 Say Yes to Languages - primary languages sampler module	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with staff and BOM with regard to participation in the scheme Make application Source language teacher, Organise classes Process grant payment
0025/2023 Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Secure substitute cover
0029/2023 Brief Absences for Staff other than Persons employed as Teachers and Special Needs Assistants employed in Education and Training Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process applications Recruit replacement staff Organise Garda Vetting
0033/2023 Carer's Leave Scheme for Special Needs Assistants employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process applications Recruit replacement staff Organise Garda Vetting
0034/2023 DEIS Delivering equality of opportunity in schools action planning and grant allocation for all DEIS schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation Leading School Development Developing Leadership Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate DEIS Plans for attendance, retention, literacy, numeracy, supporting educational transitions Partnership with parents and others
0036/2023 Publication of Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM
0039/2023 Primary Mathematics Curriculum for primary and special schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Attend training with a nominated staff member Coordinate training of all staff with Oide tutor Oversee implementation of new curriculum

Circular	LAOS Domains	Principal's Responsibility
0048/2023 Adoptive Leave Scheme for Special Needs Assistants employed in Recognised Primary and Post-Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Process new category of leave application Recruit replacement SNA Organise Garda Vetting Secure substitute cover
0047/2023 Adoptive Leave Scheme for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Process new category of leave application Recruit replacement teacher
0049/2023 Election of new Boards of Management of Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Patron regarding election of patron nominees Organise election of parent nominees Organise election of teacher nominee Coordinate with the aforementioned nominees re the co-option of community nominees Advise BOM members of training opportunities
0050/2023 Unpaid Leave for Medical Care Purposes for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Process new category of leave application Recruit substitute teacher
0051/2023 Unpaid Leave for Medical Care Purposes for Special Needs Assistants employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation Leading School Development Developing Leadership Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM Process new category of leave application Recruit substitute SNA Organise Garda Vetting

Analysis of Policy Guidelines and other related documents

Document	LAOS Domains	Principal's Responsibility
Report of Education Needs for the purpose of Assessment of Need (Disability Act 2005) October 2022 (Update June 23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School to complete Report of Education Needs for the purpose of Assessments of Needs
National Nursing Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs Pilot Scheme October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where relevant, engage with pilot nursing programme
Advice / guidance to schools regarding the use of Physical Fitness Testing in Physical Education lessons November 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement guidance on physical fitness testing
Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying December 2022 (Updated June 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with action plan when relevant
Promoting the participation of children and young people in inspection: Information for educators January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate details of circular to staff and BOM
Looking at... series (primary school) January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Curricular areas using guidance. Drama, History, Geography, PE, Mathematics, Music, Science, SPHE, Art
NRRP Digital Divide Grant Survey for Schools Primary Mathematics Curriculum for primary and special schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete survey
2023 Summer Programme: school-based programme in special schools February 2023 (Updated June 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation Leading School Development Developing Leadership Capacity 	Implement school-based summer programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Guidance Recruit staff Enrol pupils
Free Primary Schoolbooks Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise purchase and distribution of schoolbooks, workbooks and copies (at a minimum) for all children Recruit administrator and organise payroll

Document	LAOS Domains	Principal's Responsibility
Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools(revised 2023) August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement revised procedures
Cineáltas Implementation Plan 2023-2027 April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow implementation plan
Pilot Programme of Counselling and Wellbeing / Mental Health Supports in Primary Schools 2023-2024 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in pilot where relevant
National School Attendance Campaign 2023 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Teaching and Learning Managing the Organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in training seminars

Our

School



